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As this chapter explores, queer theory is a valuable set of conceptual resources for organization studies scholars to draw upon to study, both theoretically and empirically, transpeople's experiences of work and careers. Queer theory emphasizes a non-essentializing approach to conceptualizing gender, articulated forcefully in Judith Butler's (1990, 1993, 1999, 2004) notion of gender performativity. Butler's writing is celebrated by queer theorists for providing the conceptual apparatus to problematize the dominant sex-gender system that sustains harmful and restrictive binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine (Sullivan, 2003). More than this is that queer theory aims to nourish the possibilities for imagining and living gender in ways that rupture and transcend these binaries. As such, queer theory has been used, albeit in different ways, as a resource for advancing academic debate on transgender issues and empirical analyses of transpeople's lives (Elliot, 2010; Halberstam, 1998, 2005; Wilchins, 2002). Somewhat similarly, transgender is a timely area of study as legislative reform in many European countries, including the United Kingdom (for example, the Gender Recognition Act, 2004 and the Equality Act, 2010), and the increasing visibility of transgender in popular and media culture, have conditioned the possibility for different expressions of gender diversity in and outside the workplace (Hines, 2010). While these prospects for living gender diversity are exciting, research indicates that transpeople experience disproportionately high rates of violence, harassment and discrimination in, for example, workplaces, schools, healthcare institutions and child welfare systems (Bauer et al., 2009; Dispenza et al., 2012; Sperber et al., 2005; Stotzer, 2009).

In regard to the world of work, many transpeople experience aggression, hostility and discrimination, leading to social isolation, threats and acts of violence, stress, job demotions and dismissal (Connell, 2010; Dietert and Dentice, 2009; Dispenza et al., 2012; Pepper and Lorah, 2008; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009). Transpeople face formidable work and career-related challenges and barriers in the workplace, including the accommodations that employers should make to ensure that transpeople are provided with a safe, discrimination-free work environment (Budge et al., 2010; Ozturk and Tatli, 2016). For example: administrative processes are required to facilitate change of forename and gender identity; trans-inclusive policies should be developed regarding the use of changing rooms and male/female toilets; work colleagues should use appropriate gender pronouns when referring to transpeople; and employers must support employees who engage in processes of gender transitioning. Fear and misunderstanding about the gamut of transgender issues among cisgender employees (that is, those employees who identify as the gender that matches the sex that they were assigned at birth) is a major problem, as it fuels harmful stereotypes, hostility and violence towards transpeople at work (Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos, 2010). Research shows that, due to perceived risks of and actual incidents of violence, discrimination and bullying, transpeople regard certain careers as unattainable, such as the genderqueer study participant interviewed by Budge et al. (2010) who ruled out ever working with children. Other studies reveal that transpeople are likely to consider and change to lower-skilled, lower-paid employment following gender transitioning (Gagné et al., 1997). As one male-to-female (MtF) transsexual study participant in Riach et al. (2014) put it: 'If I can't be a partner in this [accounting] firm, it doesn't matter. If it means I've got to do some work that maybe is at a lower level than I do now, it doesn't matter. I just want to be ordinary'. Clearly, living a trans identity can detrimentally alter not only an individual's career aspirations and trajectory, but also their material circumstances.

Taking this empirical material into account, and the absence or uneven legal protection for transpeople within specific countries, some scholars are rightly cautious about the prospects for progressive change. Commenting on the United States context for transpeople, Budge et al. (2010, p. 378) conclude that although 'popular culture may have increased the public attention to transgender issues, the present outlook for decreasing work discrimination directed at this population looks bleak'. Striving to improve this prognosis, research on transpeople, work and careers is both vital and necessary, accentuated by the observation that transpeople are either ignored altogether in organizational research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and intersex (LGBQI) employees, or lumped together with other non-heterosexual individuals and viewed similarly (Law et al., 2011). This does not mean to say that we should study transpeople separately from LGB individuals; rather, greater sensitivity must be paid to the differences in how transpeople experience career-related discrimination and what organizations can do to foster work environments that are safe and inclusive of transpeople. This chapter begins by outlining some of the principal concepts associated with the study of transpeople in the workplace. Next, it articulates a queer theory perspective and how it might be deployed as a resource for advancing organizational research on transpeople's multiple and sometimes conflicting desires and goals around gender transgression and congruency, work and careers. The chapter concludes by offering some observations on recommendations for improving the work lives of transpeople.

#### <a>CONCEPTS

##### <b>Transpeople

This chapter adopts the term 'transpeople' as a generic category used to describe those individuals who identify as transgender, transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer, gender benders, drag queens and kings, transwomen,

transmen, female-to-male (FtM) and male-to-female (MtF) and non-binary. These identities are by no means exhaustive of the possibilities of expressing gender diversity, but they are some of the more familiar terms that have entered into and are currently circulated within academic and populist discourse. Some terms have gained more popularity and currency, such as 'transgender', a label often used to designate individuals who 'deliberately reject their original gender assignment' (Connell, 2010, p. 33). For instance, transgender individuals may identify as 'transgender', or by using some of the terms outlined above. One commonality perhaps among transgender people is the rejection or questioning of their original, biological gender assignment. This interrogation of gender assignment can throw into sharp relief how a dichotomous conceptualization of sex (male/female) and gender (masculine/feminine) is so taken for granted within many societies that it is accepted as 'natural'. The pervasiveness and durability of the gender binary is problematic, as those individuals who cannot and/or do not wish to identify according to a masculine/feminine binary, or seek to transition across the binary from one gender category to another, can experience serious personal and professional repercussions. When laying claim to and living variant gender identities entails hard-fought battles, individuals may invest personally in living specific gender identities (for example, transgender, genderqueer, and so on), underscoring the need to demonstrate sensitivity in how transpeople prefer to be identified in and outside the workplace.

### **<b>Cisgender and Cisnormativity**

Scholars have used the concept of cisgender to refer to non-trans people as gendered subjects. The 'cis' prefix, derived from Latin, meaning 'alongside of' (or 'on the same side'), is used to describe the gender identification of individuals who feel that their assigned sex aligns with their assigned gender. Or, as Serano puts it, cisgender designates 'people who are not transsexual and who have only ever experienced their subconscious and physical sexes as being aligned' (Serano, 2007, p. 12). For Schilt and Westbrook (2009), the term 'cisgender' complements 'trans', the prefix derived from Latin for 'across' or 'over'. Schilt and Westbrook use cisgender to 'replace the terms "nontransgender" or "bio man/bio woman" to refer to individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity' (ibid., p. 461). Mobilizing cisgender as a category of analysis maintains a spotlight on gender when examining the interactions between and reactions of cisgender people to transpeople in and outside of the workplace. While cisgender places emphasis on non-transgender people as gendered subjects, it is important to acknowledge that cisgender people may identify differently sexually – as heterosexual, straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual – giving rise to provocative questions about how different cisgender people may reproduce the values and practices that sustain a heteronormative and cisnormative alignment of sex and gender.

While 'heteronormativity' is a popular term for understanding how heterosexuality is ascribed a 'normal' and 'natural' status predicated on a set of assumptions that there are only two sexual categories (for example, heterosexuality/homosexuality), other terms have been developed to understand and analyse the gendered dynamics underpinning the oppression experienced by transpeople. One of the most influential is 'cisnormativity'. Established in the work of Bauer et al. (2009, p. 356), cisnormativity 'describes the expectation that all people are cissexual, that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women. This assumption is so pervasive that it otherwise has not yet been named'. Cisnormativity allows scholars to illuminate and question cisnormative assumptions about sex and gender that pervade many societies, but remain difficult to recognize because they are taken for granted. Cisnormativity is a potentially powerful analytical concept through which scholars may scrutinize cisnormative assumptions within the workplace. It can focus clearly on how the lives, issues and interests of transpeople can be erased through workplace policies and practices, and the types of interactions and workplace relations transpeople experience with cisgender people (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009). Furthermore, understanding how cisnormativity can operate as an organizing principle and organizing element of social life can open up avenues for future research that attend to how transpeople differ in how they negotiate cisnormativity in the workplace. As such, scholars may also speak of and study transphobia, transprejudice and transnegativity as instances of cisnormativity, terms used to variously describe the irrational fear, aversions, hostility and violence towards transpeople who live within societies where cisgender people are identified and privileged as gender 'normal' (Norton, 1997; Serano, 2007).

### **<b>Gender Transitioning**

Transitioning is a key concept that is traditionally associated with the medical and surgical procedures (for example, hormone therapy, body reconstruction surgery) favoured by transsexuals to alter their assigned biological sex at birth to a different gender identity. In medical discourse, terms such as 'pre-transition', 'transitioning' and 'post-transition' are used to identify distinct stages in the gender transitioning process. The acronyms MtF (male-to-female) and FtM (female-to-male) are often deployed to describe transsexuals for whom transitioning from one gender category to another is a necessary change in order to live a fulfilling life as a 'man' or 'woman'. In contrast, cisgender people are, as discussed above, frequently understood as 'gender normal' in the sense of keeping their bodies intact to maintain congruence between their assigned biological sex and gender identities. However, recent research has treated gender transitioning as a more capacious term to include other types of alterations and experiences associated with transitioning. Budge et al. (2013, p. 604)

favour a more inclusive definition of gender transitioning that includes the array of processes (physical, emotional and psychological) that ‘all transgender individuals go through to identify as transgender’. In other words, it is not just MtF and FtM transpeople who gender transition. Viewed in this way and drawing on qualitative interview data, Budge et al. (2013) reveal how gender transitioning includes accounts of coping mechanisms, emotional hardship and lack of support, positive social support and affirmative emotional experiences, throughout the process of gender transitioning. The more inclusive approach to theorizing gender transitioning has been invaluable for developing models to describe the role of coping mechanisms and forms of support needed by transpeople throughout the gender transition process (Bauer et al., 2009; Budge et al., 2013).

#### **<a>THEORY**

Taking the key concepts defined above into account, this section of the chapter advocates using queer theory as a conceptual resource that organization studies scholars can use to examine the work and career-related experiences of transpeople. Queer theory has a long and rich heritage in the humanities ever since it was coined as a title for a US conference in 1990 and in a subsequent article in 1991 by feminist Teresa de Lauretis. Since its debut on the academic conference scene, queer theory has been rapidly appropriated by humanities and cultural studies scholars, and more recently by social scientists, as a theoretical resource for reading signs of queerness: the narratives, identities, relationships, images, discourses and texts that can be read as ‘queer’ – as something at odds with cultural and social regimes of normativity (see Edelman, 2004; Halperin, 1995, 2003; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993). Put differently, queer theory is able to call to account the ways in which things become ‘normal’ and what phenomena are ascribed normative status. As David Halperin famously put it: ‘Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*’ (Halperin, 1995, p. 62). Indeed, queer theory actively resists precise definition, not least because some queer theorists contend that reducing it to a fixed set of precepts and ideas will impair its ‘magical power to usher in a new age of sexual radicalism and fluid gender possibilities’ (Halperin, 2003, p. 339). As such, queer theory analyses and politics are frequently underwritten by a notion of antinormativity, apparent in how queer theory is conceptualized as a critical and political practice that ‘undermines norms, challenges normativity and interrupt[s] the processes of normalisation’ (Wie and Wilson, 2015, p. 4). In this regard, queer theory is usefully approached by asking not what it is, but what can it do. In that sense, queer theory is treated in this chapter as a verb, ‘to queer’, whereby organization studies scholars can draw on the assemblage of competing ideas, theories, themes and political strategies that have crystallized from queer theory’s intellectual pedigree in radical feminism, gay and lesbian studies and poststructuralism. In so doing, they may use queer theory to weaken and rupture the naturalized and normalizing binaries of sexuality and gender that shape the interactions and the material circumstances of transpeople’s work lives and career experiences. However, in engaging with queer theory to these ends, issues come to the fore that require careful attention, of which two examples are provided below.

#### **<b>Gender as Performative**

One issue relates to the conceptualization of gender. In organizational research, there is a well-established tradition of theorizing gender as a variable or fixed property of the individual (Ashcraft, 2009). For example, Broadbridge and Simpson (2011) note, of the gender and management literature, the tendency among scholars to adopt an unproblematic view of gender as a stable category of difference. One consequence of embracing this perspective is that the gender binary remains intact, averting opportunities for understanding how gender norms may be contested and challenged. The matter of how transpeople negotiate gender norms in the workplace is a central concern in research that examines the work experiences of transpeople (Connell, 2010; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Muhr et al., 2016; Schilt and Connell, 2007). As such, some organizational researchers have used queer theory as a springboard or a key for unlocking doors to study how the performance of gender norms can, for instance, shape the career-related discrimination and opportunities experienced by transpeople (Brewis et al., 1997; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Muhr et al., 2016; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016). Equally, it allows organization scholars to explore how transpeople may resist gender norms in order to construct more meaningful selves, identities, relations and careers in the workplace. For these purposes a performative view of gender is advantageous.

The notion of gender as performative originates in the writing of Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1999, 2004), a feminist/queer theorist whose work on gender performativity marks a radical departure from conceptions of gender that imply a fixed and universal identity. In contrast, gender performativity is premised on Butler’s conviction that gender is a corporeal style, an act as it were, which ‘is both intentional and performative, where “performative” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning’ (Butler, 1999, p. 177). Importantly, for Butler, performativity ‘cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject’ (Butler, 1993, p. 95). Understood as such, Butler (1993) emphasizes that subject positions are continually evoked through stylized acts of repetition, and it is through acts of repetition that gender becomes ritualized, the effects of which make it appear natural. In this frame, terms of ‘gender designation are thus never settled once and for all but are

constantly in the process of being remade' (Butler, 2004, p. 10). Butler (1993) argues that performativity is not reducible to the notion of performance because the latter presupposes the existence of a 'performer' or subject, while performativity contests the notion of a preformed subject. Thus gender is performative because it is the effect of a regularized repetition of norms that may both enable and constrain how lives can be lived.

Mobilizing Butler's performative ontology of gender, researchers can seek to escape the confines of a gender-as-variable approach that has dominated organizational research. At the same time, although Butler insists that gender is unstable and in a constant process of being remade, this does not mean to say that stability is neither desired nor required by transpeople. As Butler (2004, p. 8) points out, 'a livable life does require various degrees of stability', just as a 'life for which no [gender] categories of recognition exist is not a livable life'. This argument has relevance for understanding the decisions made by different types of transpeople about their careers. For instance, Mark, a 64-year-old transman interviewed by Connell (2010), adopted a 'stealth' approach at work, meaning that he did not 'identify himself as a transman, leaving [him] subject to the same accountability structures of doing gender that cispeople must negotiate' (ibid., p. 39). In Mark's case, fear of discrimination motivated his decision to adopt a strategy of stealth and, over time, he learned to perform gender in an appropriately 'masculine' way that allows him to pursue a successful career as a 'man'. Other interviewees who were 'out' at work as transgender sought to undermine the gendered expectations of co-workers. For instance, Connell (2010) refers to Kyle, a transman who 'made deliberate decisions to keep so-called "feminine" aspects of his work style in his employment' because he felt they were central to his identity as a transman, but also because they helped Kyle to distinguish himself from other male co-workers as a male who is sensitive and communicative. Such expressions of gender may give transpeople like Kyle distinctiveness that is valued by employers within specific work contexts. As the examples above illustrate, it is unwise to assume how transpeople might desire and establish (in)stability in how they relate to specific gender categories in different work contexts and in specific moments in time. Actual cases are far more complicated and contingent, warranting close analyses of the contextual accountability to gender norms experienced by transpeople in specific workplaces.

### **<b>Transpeople as Transgressive in the Workplace**

The gender-as-performative approach allows organization researchers to go some way towards grasping the richness of transpeople's experiences of gender at work. Queer theory can help us to focus on the performance of gender norms to reveal how transpeople might resist regimes of the normal, such as heteronormativity and cisnormativity, another avenue of research that deserves greater attention than it currently receives. However, this chapter suggests key qualifiers for future scholarship in this area. One important concern is how some transpeople can be heralded by queer theorists to denote radical forms of gender transgression. As Elliot (2010) avers, while queer theory has often praised and positioned some transpeople (for example, genderqueer, transgender, non-binary) as exemplars of gender transgression, scholars must avoid mobilizing queer theory to establish the terms by which to measure the 'value' of transpeople's lives and aspirations. In other words, queer theory's appropriation of transgender as a model of gender transgression, deployed in the ongoing political project of rupturing gender binaries, can occlude the experiences of those transpeople for whom gender stability is a necessity in living a fulfilling life in and outside the workplace. Butler's (2004) writing on transgender has been criticized on this count by trans studies scholars such as Namaste (2005) and Salah (2007). Salah (2007) points to how Butler's (2004) discussion of transgender people, which examines how transgender people can resist sex-gender coherence, ignores the perspectives of MtF and FtM transsexuals who actively seek to relocate themselves within a gender binary. In so doing, transsexuals may establish a sense of congruence between sex and gender, providing the conditions by which they can live as a 'man' or 'woman'. These rifts within transgender debates produce insights that funnel toward a salutary conclusion: transpeople are not intrinsically transgressive and queer theory's proclivity for associating gender transgression with transpeople must be problematized, otherwise it risks affirming the authenticity of specific transpeople only when they are gender binary bashing (Halberstam, 1998, 2005; Hines, 2010; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016).

Overcoming the limitations of queer theory in that regard, trans/queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam (1998, 2005) cautions against distilling gender into an unspecified fluidity; rather, greater sensitivity is needed to examine more carefully the nuances and movements within an otherwise rigid gender binary. Halberstam's (1998, 2005) writing on trans bodies and lives seeks, in part, to acknowledge differences between transpeople (the embodied experiences of transgender people are likely to be different to those who identify as transsexual, genderqueer or non-binary), but also to recognize the porous nature of gender categories. Crucial, then, is how scholars use queer theory, for example as a critical resource for studying the embodied experiences of living a trans identity in specific contexts. Thus, the interrogation of gender differences may be situated within a material analysis of transpeople's everyday lives. This sentiment is manifest, to some extent, in the organizational literature on transpeople's experiences of work; in particular, the stream of literature that calls for more qualitative research on the lived experiences of transpeople in specific work contexts (Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Muhr et al., 2016; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016). The recent work of Muhr et al. (2016) illustrates the possibilities here.

Analysing the work experiences of Claire, a MtF transwoman, Muhr et al. (2016) develop the concept of 'situated transgressiveness', which implies that the 'potential for transgressiveness within work and professional contexts is heavily nuanced, fluid and contingent to a variety of situated work contexts, such as roles, locales and interactions with others' (ibid., p. 66). For example, Muhr et al. (ibid., p. 65) note how Claire makes no attempt to 'mask or downplay her trans body, regardless of audience resistance', when working in a public advocacy role for transgender rights. In these situations, Claire advocates and embodies gender fluidity. In her role as a manager, Claire manages her trans identity according to the various requirements made of her by work colleagues. In these instances, gender binaries can be preserved through gender performances that are tailored to situational demands which may entail downplaying gender and foregrounding the 'gender neutral' characteristics associated with being professional. Claire's transgression of the gender binary is influenced by normative expectations of sex, gender, work and professionalism, all of which intermingle in different ways to enable and constrain how Claire can live her work career and life as a transwoman. This study and others like it (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016) illustrate the sheer complexity of transpeople's experiences in the workplace, giving rise to future research questions around how transpeople can hold multiple and sometimes conflicting desires and goals around gender transgression and congruency, work and careers.

#### <a>IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has explored how queer theory can help organization studies scholars to examine the work and career experiences of transpeople. While there are likely to be disagreements among scholars about what role queer theory might play in this endeavour, queer theory emphasizes the obligation to consider how transpeople's lives can be improved. In respect to supporting transpeople in the workplace, prior research makes a number of recommendations that have widespread applicability and relevance for practitioners around issues such as gender transitioning and career development (Davis, 2009; Ozturk and Tatli, 2016; Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos, 2010). For example, Dispenza et al. (2012) call for employers to provide unisex toilets, especially important for employees who are gender transitioning or who do not feel comfortable with such spaces being designated 'female' or 'male'. Staff representatives who have received training on trans issues might be called upon to represent and/or enable those transpeople who struggle to articulate their experiences living as trans at work. Education and training programmes also have a role in helping cisgender employees to understand the challenges transpeople face in the workplace, such as the adoption of preferred pronouns during workplace interactions. Employers should be obligated to provide career counselling when transpeople undergo processes of gender transitioning. Employer sponsored healthcare schemes that cater for transpeople's needs are also relevant, as are policies that prohibit all forms of discrimination against transpeople. These measures can positively influence the disclosure behaviours of transpeople in the workplace, which research has shown to be positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Law et al., 2011).

However, queer theory also provokes important questions about how legislating or policy-making that proscribes what is 'livable' (to coin Butler's term) for all transpeople is, in practice, livable only for some. For example, initiatives designed to help MtF and FtM transsexuals transition from one gender category to another might ignore the specific needs of genderqueer and transgender employees, whose embodied experiences of gender transitioning might radically differ. Critical here is that organizational practice does not treat transpeople or terms such as 'transgender' as homogenous and unified categories. Here, queer theory analyses can question organizational practices and instruments that aim to improve the institutional circumstances of transgender employees, for they can operate to establish norms about how transpeople ought to be at work. At worst, they may unintentionally create new hierarchies wherein some embodied expressions of trans identities at work are more tolerated than others (Riach et al., 2014). Saying as much is to recognize that if barriers to transpeople's careers and participation in the workplace are to be overcome, then scholars and practitioners must be committed toward understanding more deeply the contingent and varied experiences of different types of transpeople within specific work contexts.

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